Agricultural Catastrophes: Revising Settler Belonging and the Farming Novel in *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*

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Toward the end of Carrie Tiffany's 2005 novel, *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living,* Jean Finnegan, the novel's protagonist, stares with horror at the roots of the Mallee scrub. They have been exposed by a catastrophic dust storm, marking the culmination of a long line of tragedies for her farm. She reflects:

> In the pure state of nature the root of the plant lies beneath the soil, not above it. But here the drift has blown the soil away, several feet of it, so the roots of the Mallee scrub sit up, exposed, like the unclothed bodies of men and women. There is something obscene in the way the tripod legs meet the torso, often with dangling root hairs or hanging tuberous growth. (145)

The loss of topsoil on the farm is the result of land clearing conducted by Jean's husband, Robert Pettergree. The year is 1938, and he dreams of greening the Mallee (121)—a region of north-west Victoria, now well known for its knobbly scrub, semi-arid conditions, and infamous dust storms (Potter and Magner 3).[1] For Jean, the emerging picture she details gives rise to an uneasiness about her sense of belonging in this place. In this passage, the Mallee scrub laid to waste by the effect of the crop planting is rendered as both human and diseased, the tuberous growth evoking something cancerous, or unnatural. This perversity reflects Jean's own burgeoning awareness of the destructive nature of monocrop agriculture, as she comes to understand her interventions into the local geology as monstrous. The catastrophe marks a turning point in Tiffany's novel—what follows is a series of deaths, leading to a collapse of both the farm and Jean's marriage. In doing so, the novel neatly subverts the teleology of the settler-colonial farm novel in which settler sovereignty is articulated through reproduction of both the family and farm.

Literary historian Tony Hughes-d'Aeth has argued that what makes the settler-colonial farm novel distinct is its double agency. He argues that in these novels, the farm emerges in the background of intersubjective drama—in other words, the plot is staged on the emerging farm which signifies the 'reality of successful colonisation' (*Settlers of the Marsh* 342). Human actors are connected to the labour of farming through what Hughes-d'Aeth calls the 'sacrament of their lives' (342). He argues that this is expressed through two sacred spheres:

> The work of the field—the clearing of the 'bush' and, most classically, the planting and reaping of staple crops . . . [and] the work of the hearth—particularly the reproduction of children who are to be the legitimate heirs of the world that has been initiated. (342)

As Hughes-d'Aeth goes on to write, 'it almost goes without saying that the farm is the metonym of colonisation and that the reaped crops and the generation of heirs are the seals of its legitimacy' (342). With attention to the sacrament of the field and hearth, my reading of *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* will question how failure of both the farm and the family in Tiffany's text poses a series of significant challenges to both non-Indigenous Australian

belonging and the teleology of the settler-colonial farm novel. I argue that by drawing together historiography, the farm novel, and making them the subject of postcolonial critique, Tiffany provides a conceptual space for thinking the history of Australia differently, while responding to the farm novel that emerged with 'different traditions in Australasia, North America and southern Africa' in the first half of the 20th century (Hughes-d'Aeth 207). Specifically, I examine how Tiffany deploys agricultural catastrophes to destabilise the ideology of progress as a technology for claiming land under the dictum of proper use, consequently bringing the linear history of colonial history into contest.

The Australian Settler Colonial Farm Novel

The settler colonial farm novel has played a role in formulating the imaginaries of many settler states. In his comparative analysis of North American farm novels, Florian Freitag argues that the farm is often depicted as a 'symbolic space' in which agriculture is more than an 'economic venture or a way of life' (5). The setting, labour and tropes of these novels 'dramatize the relationship between farming and constructing the nation and depict agriculture as a social practice that has helped to articulate the nation' (5). Given that these novels often express ideas of nationhood, it is unsurprising that they 'tend to portray specific types of farmers and to project particular national myths or ideologies onto the farm space' (Freitag 22).[2] In other words, through the practice of farming, these novels become a way to articulate settler sovereignty, through the hard work of building the nation.

While nations with a settler-colonial history such as South Africa and the North Americas have a long, and often valorised cannon of farm novels (Freitag; Devarenne; Coetzee), Australia has so few that it could be argued that no such history exists. Tony Hughes-d'Aeth attributes this relative absence to the lingering power of the Station Novel ('The Settler Colonial Farm Novel' 195). The distinction between the two is significant, as they usher forth different imaginaries. As Hughes-d'Aeth outlines:

> The station . . . was large (10,000 to 20,000 acres or larger) and held under lease from the colony or state, and relied on natural vegetation for stockfeed. A station was run, even when controlled by a family, on a corporate basis in the sense that it depended on a significant workforce of shepherds or stockriders, with a central 'station' and a network of outstations to oversee and muster the very large number of animals being grazed. . . . The image of the station was not shaped by the yeoman ideal . . . but by a nostalgic feudalism, styled on the English country house or manor. (195)

By contrast, the farm was far smaller, and was generally owned and 'and run by nuclear families and depended on clearing and cultivating the land for crops or sown pasture' (195). The distinction between the two ultimately ushers very different imaginaries: where the station novel harkens to a pastoralist ideal linked to the landed aristocracy, the farm gave rise to a view of a nation built by small business owners. Even with the decline of the station at the turn of the 20th century, the lingering romance of the station novel and its attendant archetypes—the bushranger, the shearer—persisted. While farm novels did begin to emerge in the early 20th century, Hughes-d'Aeth argues these are largely anti-farm novels, such as Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* (1901). Typically these novels lament the fall from the aristocracy of pastoral landholding to farming, and are generally critical of the practice of farming ('The Settler Colonial Farm Novel' 202).

As I will go on to show, the text heavily depends on the tropes of the farm novel even as it subverts them. Tiffany takes from the anti-farm novel the critique of farming but excludes its nostalgia for the pastoral aristocracy. Rather the critique of the farm and the farm novel attends to the modernisation of agriculture, and the ideology of progress that attended it, in order to interrogate the logics that underpin settler occupancy. Importantly, as a work of historical fiction, Tiffany's take on the farm novel should be read not only as a critique of the specific history of the Mallee of the 1930s, but also as a work that engages with the concerns surrounding settler belonging in early 2000s Australia. As Emily Potter has argued, the 1990s was a period that brought about a 'shaking up of [Australia's] conscience in regards to its colonial legacies in foundations,' (3) following a series of key cultural and legal events such as the 1992 Mabo decision that challenged the *terra nullius* doctrine. In turn, this gave rise to 'a series of concerns around time, place and ecological pressures [which] coalesced in the heightened reiteration of an anxiety long held in [Australia]: the status of non-indigenous belonging to the land never ceded by Indigenous presence or claim' (2). As Potter's exemplary text, *Writing Belonging at the Millennium* attests, many literary novels of the period wrestled with these concerns, producing imaginaries for belonging on contested ground. Tiffany's take on the farm novel should be read as refocusing the farm novel through these concerns.

Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living

While telling the tragic love story between sewing instructor Jean Finnegan and Robert Pettergree, a soil scientist, *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* [3] offers a nuanced deconstruction of the ideology of progress, and its desire to civilise the land through Western-styled agricultural practice. [4] This ideology suffuses the realms of both field and hearth in Tiffany's text, as evidenced in the novel's opening pages. *Everyman's Rules* begins in 1934 aboard the 'Better Farming Train'; a train packed with livestock, and experts in agriculture (all men), and a few women who specialise in teaching 'infant welfare, cookery, and home sciences' (2) to farmers' wives. The train aims to 'bring progress' (9) by educating farmers throughout rural Victoria, a goal that nearly all men on the train fervently support. Jean reflects on the men's conversation:

> [The men] are so sure of progress they measure it constantly—number of acres cleared in a day, bushels of hay cut, pints of milk produced, acres of seed sown, tons of firewood cut. Men measure the activity of progress 'per man, per day.' Although this seems to deny something even I can see—that all men are different, that some light the way with their ideas and others are merely followers. (9)

For the men of the train, the work of the field is understood to be progressing the nation—it is something that can be measured objectively. With the inclusion of the women's carriage, the hearth is coupled with these ideals.

For Jean, progress is enticing but limited. Able to discern the obvious variation between bodies and their capacities for particular forms of labour, she identifies the failure of science to account for difference. The inability of the men to identify the bias in their supposedly objective gaze is made even stranger by their inability to recognise the differences between them. While the men view themselves as bound under a banner of unified progress, Jean can see the divergence of their interests; for instance, she notes that Mr. Baker is unruly and only wants to speak of pigs (10), whereas Mr Pettergree is a 'scientific recluse' (11).

'Progress' is further troubled in the novel's opening by the superintendent who talks about the train as an instrument of propaganda, and the workers on the train as propagandists rather than educators (11). This distinction drawn between propaganda and education undermines the ideology of progress by revealing the education of farmers to be primarily ideological, rather than scientific as the men of the train would like to believe. This opening, although small, questions the logic of settler belonging. As Timothy Neale has argued, farming's capacity to transform the landscape was foundational to the logics of colonial domination. Neale argues that the early colonists sought to characterise Indigenous people as wild, and like the land, in need of cultivation (9–17). He argues that like many indigenous peoples, Indigenous Australians were 'falsely thought to have "failed the Lockean test" by having neglected to work the land and thereby become a polity' (13). As Neale goes on to detail, this test was bound to a belief that a progressed people were those who had tamed, and thence civilised, their environment through technical mastery.

This worldview, which constructed nature as something to be mastered, is of course bound to the ideology of progress. Whitney A. Bauman has critiqued the ideology of progress neatly, calling it a 'logic of mastery [that] helps to build the illusion that we are somehow beyond the cycle of death and decay' (748). The illusion, Bauman argues, is primarily sustained by technology, and its perceived ability to remove people from waste, 'food . . . from its relationship with the Earth and other life, and to secure . . . bodies from the rest of the natural world, not to mention securing white bodies from brown ones' (748–49). In the case of Australia, these logics of mastery worked against many Indigenous ontologies, as Nunga/Ngarrindjeri scholar Irene Watson argues. She writes:

> Instead of propagating the rich and layered understanding of our relationship to country, the colonial project deployed, constructed and communicated to the world the myth of native savagery and the absence of an understanding of how to 'properly use' the land. (509)

Watson's insistence that colonialism matters here as the colonial model of land exploitation worked to construct a worldview that saw the Australian continent as an unemployed wilderness, without a meaningful history—in short, it turned it from Country to bush. Many scholars have critiqued the demarcation of 'the bush' as a mythologised universal nonurban (Schama; Holmes and Mirmohamadi 194; Hughes-d'Aeth, 'The Settler Colonial Farm Novel' 196), arguing that it enabled a conceptualisation of Australian landscape that appeared unremarkable, indistinct, and unemployed.

This worldview was certainly alive in the Mallee at the turn of the twentieth century. In their analysis of writing about the Mallee from 1840–1914, Katie Holmes and Kylie Mirmohamadi have argued that the othered nonurban bush was not a place so much as a 'homogenised adversary' where new farming communities combatted the environment, flood, fire, drought or Indigenous owners, 'somewhere beyond the metropolitan centre' (194). This battle sought to turn a 'howling wilderness' into a 'promised land' (Holmes and Mirmohamadi 193) in a utopian quest for progress and development that was often imaged as a triumph of light over darkness, broadly echoing Enlightenment aesthetics. Holmes and Mirmohamadi's insight resonates closely with Tiffany's treatment of land.

In *Everyman's Rules*, Jean believes that some men can 'light the way' (9), even though early in the novel she expresses some scepticism about progress. Those things that represent progress

are frequently bathed in light, such as superphosphate—the fertiliser that Robert Petergree dreams will green the Mallee (121). Mary Maloney, one of the women who works with Jean on the train claims that superphosphate 'makes you light up,' and tells a story of how a farmer's hands had lit up after spreading the fertiliser (6). Jean wonders, 'if it lit up your body, would it light up your mind?' (7). The desire for progress here is rendered as a flourishing of agriculture enabled by the extraction of minerals from elsewhere, and as a means of bettering humanity by pulling them toward the light. That Robert is an advocate of superphosphate is significant; as a fertiliser extracted by strip-mining the Pacific Islands, superphosphate displaces both the Islanders under whose feet it lay and the Indigenous owners in Australia, who were moved off the land so the settlers could put it to 'proper use.'

On the train, Robert too is always bathed in light, as it were. As a soil scientist, working in the wheat carriage, a 'glasshouse on wheels' (6) that serves as an agricultural laboratory, he represents a view that relates to land always as something to be tamed, exploited, made productive. Robert believes that his findings could be replicated anywhere. However, Robert's experiments are conducted in a context that gives rise to an understanding of agriculture without local inconveniences or eccentricities—in his glasshouse environment free of wind, insects, mice or water shortages. In this manner, Robert lays claim to the land's agricultural potential, without ever having to encounter it. The absurdity of this is borne out in the novel's second half, where Robert's scientific knowledge fails to prevent the series of tragedies that afflict his farm.

Robert is characterised as a man of 'scientific living' who publishes the manifesto 'Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living' (43) from which the novel draws its title. This manifesto consists of eight points, and advocates for a humanist ethic, with claims such as: 'The only true foundation is a fact,' and 'Avoid mawkish consideration of history and religion' (43). The final point reads: 'Bring science into the home' (43). For Robert, all aspects of life are inextricably bound to the ideology of progress, a point that Jean espouses after being taught the scientific method by Robert. She states:

> [M]y marriage to Robert will be about *more* than love. It will be a modern marriage, in which Robert and I, as free and independent units of production, will implement the proven facts of scientific research. In which we will take the miniaturized world of the train and live it large, a real-life scale. Robert will grow his superior superphosphated wheats and, once the wheat has been milled, I will document his success by baking the annual test loaves in my experimental kitchen. (59)

This version of progress reproduces the sacraments of the farm novel along gendered lines—it is Robert's work to till the fields, Jean's to cultivate the hearth. Far from the objective lens that views these two spheres as equally worthy of investigation, the working of the field is deemed superior to that of the hearth. Women may enter the field of science, but only when admitted by men—in this instance, Jean is provided with both the resources and space by Robert. The virtual arbitrariness of Jean's research is gestured to by the blueprint for the farm that Robert presents with his marriage proposal. On it, there is a house paddock, with the letter J written in it. Jean notes that, 'It is quite faint and looks to have been written recently, almost as an afterthought' (43). While Robert's experiments in the field, and Jean's in the hearth are initially pitched as in some way equal, Robert's eventual rejection of Jean's baking experiments on the farm evidence the irrelevance of her research. When she hands over her scientific report

analysing the bread baked from the 1939 harvest, Robert simply places it on the bed, before resuming his work (166). As the quality of wheat declines due to soil erosion, so too does her bread. In dismissing Jean's work, Robert relegates Jean's science to baking—as a mode of production that is limited to the domestic, it contributes no meaningful knowledge to the public sphere. Tiffany juxtaposes Jean's scientific research and the insights if offers about land degradation and environmental damage to Robert's stubborn but irrational insistence that the next year will be better (78–79; 105–06).

Despite evidence that the quality of harvested wheat is worsening with each season, Robert encourages the men of the Mallee to take on further debt to purchase superphosphate. As a novel set in a wheatbelt, it is unsurprising that Robert does so by advocating for what Hughes-d'Aeth calls the 'ideology of wheat' (*Like Nothing on this Earth*, 23), a quasi-militaristic and middle-class fantasy which helped supercharge the radical land clearing operations of the first half of the 20th century. Hughes-d'Aeth argues that in the first half of the 20th century, increased value was given to the practice of growing crops, in both economic and cultural settings. He points to the proliferation of the term Federation Wheat (24), and notes how it parallels the eruption of wheat poems and ballads that featured in local newspapers and magazines such as *The Bulletin* (28).[5] Many of these poems were martial in tone. Looking to Banjo Patterson's 1914 poem, 'The Song of the Wheat,' Hughes-d'Aeth demonstrates that the marching of armies over Europe and the march of wheat across Australia share striking poetic similarities in how they are depicted. In Patterson's worldview, both cropping and warfare were conceptualised as patriotic practices, as they ensured the health and glory of the nation (27–28).[6] Just as armies must struggle against adversity to uphold the nation, wheat must march across the land to ensure that the nation can sustain itself.

For Hughes-d'Aeth, the ideology of wheat was propagated by 'the selectors,' farmers who took up small plots of land (28) in the Australian wheatbelt (and elsewhere). The selectors were most famously valorised by the short fictions of 'Steele Rudd,' the pseudonym of Arthur Hoey Davis. Hughes-d'Aeth shows that Rudd's work, unlike many before him, places particular value in cropping. Characters toil on the land, often with great suffering, but ultimately find success as both their homes and farms expand (29). Lamond has credited these stories as giving rise to the aspirational middle-class trope of the 'Aussie Battler' (Lamond 2007), one that remains central to the Australian imaginary.[7] The reason for this, as Hughes-d'Aeth asserts, is that many selectors ran farms that looked like '[a] small business, usually family-owned and run, the people fit most nearly the petit-bourgeois, both in material conditions and in sensibility—particularly the quality of aspiration, which defines the middle class' (33). That the white fantasy of the 'fair go,' according to which a person can make it on his own through sufficient struggle, finds resonance in the ideology of wheat is unsurprising, although significant, as it reinforces not only the ideal of white heterosexual heroism but also that the land was struggled for, transformed from 'wilderness' and therefore, was *rightfully owned* by the selectors.

In *Everyman's Rules*, the ideology of wheat is explicitly articulated by Robert. After the superintendent of agriculture forwards to Robert a directive from Prime Minister Lyons to 'GROW MORE WHEAT' (113), he delivers a speech to the farmers of the Mallee in which he encourages them to import superphosphate to fertilise their crops. Again, there is an element of the militarisation of farming in the speech he gives, in which Robert states: 'I have been called to arms.' His speech deploys patriotic clichés associated with national service recruitment campaigns: 'Our country, our great country, is in dire need of your skills' (118). Robert also appeals to the fantasy of transformation, again establishing the distinct link between settler claims to land and proper use. As he asserts, 'I represent scientific endeavour and the

improvements it can make to this land. There's no magic here' (121). The link between this practice and patriotism is not a coincidence, as Robert himself confesses: 'Mr. Lyons asked me to appeal to your patriotism' (121). It is worth noting that the ideology of wheat through Robert, is connected to scientific endeavour rather than the Aussie Battler. Through this shift, Tiffany draws attention to the institutional forces that incentivised the ideology of wheat, namely the state and the academy. In doing so, Tiffany undermines the self-made myth of the battler by drawing attention the state forces that underpinned their claims to land.

Robert's desire to lead the men of the Mallee is based on a belief that science can improve the land, and that only he, a man of science, can know it well enough to realise its potential. This purported knowledge of land enables Robert both to establishe himself as an authority and in turn to exercise authority; he is able to taste soil and state where it has come from in Victoria with uncanny specificity (30). Knowledge translates here as prestige and power. It also supports the fantasy of a non-Indigenous claim to the land which might override Indigenous sovereignty. Many contemporary novels continue to activate this discourse as a way of articulating settler belonging. For example, in Mirmohamadi's study of rural Romance fiction, she notes how the protagonist of Fiona Palmer's *The Family Farm,* even when blindfolded, knows the exact soil beneath her feet from the type of native vegetation on it. Mirmohamadi argues that this suggests a 'mastery over [the land's] ways, marking the family farm as fit place for Izzy's body and labour. It also bolsters the spoken and unspoken claims for white belonging and inheritance that are contested in Australian post-colonial discourse' (221). In this paradigm, it is the settler body that animates the land—knowledge authorises the ability to lay claim to and to shape place. Conversely, Tiffany's novel can be situated in relation to a number of contemporary novels preoccupied with the question of non-Indigenous claims to land and belonging in the post Mabo moment. Emily Potter has addressed the significance of this paradigm through an analysis of the character of John McIvor, a white pastoralist in Andrew McGahan's 2004 novel, *The White Earth* who is obsessed with the implications of the Mabo decision in 1992. Uncovering the settler ideologies implicit in McIvor's claim that 'the land has to belong to someone to really come alive,' Potter writes that the implication is that 'it is the turn of white Australians, . . . to realize this claim. At the same time, Indigenous belonging is rendered not just past, but straightforward, as open to non-Indigenous comprehension and, therefore, replication' (30). In other words: rightful ownership and belonging to the land can be articulated by ongoing and effective cultivation of place—ownership of the land is legitimised through its management, largely through exploitative agricultural practices. However, for this to remain stable, Indigenous presence must be wilfully overlooked (30).

In Tiffany's work, the unspoken claims to land are undone by the failure of not only Robert and Jean's farm but also of those of their neighbours, who follow their lead. While Robert dreams of transforming the landscape into a site of hyper-productivity—he believes, with his calculations, that the Mallee alone can grow the million new acres of wheat Prime Minister Lyons wants all of Australia to grow (119)—the farm suffers a series of disasters that are left unaccounted for by his equation: the loss of topsoil, the inability of the tractor to move through the sandy earth (147), a plague of mice, and a drought. The irony here is the ideology of progress, while powerful in its ability to lead men, cannot compel the agency of the nonhuman world.

As noted earlier, Tiffany's novel draws on images of light and dark in its exploration of Enlightenment aesthetics, under which light came to signify knowledge, and with it, progress. Disasters in the text are met with images or evocations or narrative events in which darkness or blindness is centred: as the dust clouds move over Melbourne, the sky 'darkens' (145); when

Jean's beloved cow dies, she watches its corpse 'burn through the night' (155). Robert buys a cheap mare from a Chinese Hawker Wing Foot, and the animal walks through a barbed-wire fence and bleeds to death because it is blind (148). When Jean suffers a miscarriage, this occurs in a paddock in the middle of the night as Robert burns the crops. Shortly before collapsing, she sees, 'the sky and land meet in blackness, only the running streams of fire marking one from the other' (184). The miscarriage, and the failed reproduction of the hearth that it implies, is paired with the meeting of fire and darkness. The darkness as a site for settler anxiety suggests rather problematically on the part of the narrator, that fears of Indigenous reprisal and natural catastrophes stem from the same root. The juxtaposition of failures in which darkness accompanies Robert's guiding light of progress undoes claims to settler sovereignty based on proper land use. Indeed, the anxiety of displacement carried by images of darkness is directly expressed in an earlier passage in which a dust storm sails over Melbourne. Citizens remark in a series of unattributed quotes:

> 'It's a tropical storm.'
> 'It's an alien invasion.'
> 'It's the Russians.'
> 'It's a fire at the paint shop.'
> 'It's the end of the world.' (144)

Settler fears are articulated in these passages as freak weathers, as invasion and apocalypse. That all three aspects are threats that may be attributed to climate change is worth noting: as weather becomes increasingly unpredictable, it may lead to mass movements of people and to economic disasters as ecosystems fail. Failures of agricultural engineering and the ideologies of progress that underpin it also threaten safety and belonging in urban areas, by literally unsettling the country that engineering has attempted to master.

Potter and Magner have argued that the failure of Robert Pettergree's modern farming 'devastates him ontologically as well as economically' (3). Nowhere is this more evident in the novel's climatic chapter, 'A Night of Soil' (207), which again aligns darkness with settler alienation. Robert, after getting drunk at the Commercial Hotel, is abducted by disgruntled farmers and is made to taste soil through the evening, for the purposes of a betting game. While in the novel's first act Robert's gift suggested a complex understanding of place, it is revealed and understood by the farmers of the text as being shallow, and useful only as a party trick. As Neville Frogley, the man to abducts Robert says: 'Our Mr. Pettergree has a special talent, and as we know it's not for the growin' of wheat' (206). The purpose of this abduction is designed to obliterate Robert's claim to authority. While Robert may be able to place soil within a taxonomy, he does not know it well enough to understand its properties or its relationship to other elements of the nonhuman world, as his disastrously mismanaged farm attests. The movement from the light-packed greenhouse carriage to this darkness appears to represent a failure both of male scientific knowledge-making, and of settler fantasies of progress. The failure of the farm that backgrounds the penultimate moment of *Everyman's Rules* devastates the fantasy of mastery, and calls into to question the 'reality of successful colonisation' (Hughes-d'Aeth 342) signified via the emerging farm in the farm novel. In doing so, Tiffany draws into question the foundations of the settler myth, and with it, the settler colonial state that follows.

Conclusion

Through its optimistic ending, Tiffany's text gestures toward new modes of anti-progressive settler-colonial dwelling. Defeated by his failure as a farmer, Robert joins the army, leaving Jean alone. Against the advice of her neighbours to leave the Mallee (223), Jean stays on and envisions a future of her own making on the farm. She plans to invite Ollie Bowd, the daughter of a neighbour, to stay with her in the farmhouse and to help on the farm, positing a living arrangement that need not be founded on heterosexual reproduction, and the claims to land which accompany it. Jean also imagines that she might grow a 'different crop—something that belongs here' (224) rather than continue with the cultivation of wheat, which has obliterated both her marriage and the local environment. Jean's vision for the farm articulates a rejection of the ideology of wheat, and its colonial and nationalistic associations. In a further twist, Jean even supposes that she will go to visit Mr Ohno, a Japanese chicken sexer she knew on the Better Farming Train who has been interned because of the war—she jokes that she will 'fraternize with the enemy' (224). In questioning both the work of the field and of the hearth, and also questioning patriotism, Jean ultimately works to revise the sacraments of the farm novel, and in turn its teleological goal to naturalise settler belonging. Reaching out to the stranger in the midst of the nation, the Japanese Other in this case, Jean's actions speak, perhaps, of an evolving image of the Australian nation, more inclusive and multicultural.

However, for all its utopian gestures, Tiffany's text offers little about the place of Indigenous Australians. While Jean likely would not consider Indigenous sovereignty, given her role as an Australian whose existence is inextricable from a living built on expropriated land, it is significant that as the novel concludes a white settler continues to set the rules for engagement with land and place. That Tiffany does not draw any explicit link between Indigenous sovereignty and the ecological damage of white farming practices rather makes *Everyman's Rules* a different kind of novel from say *The White Earth*, which foregrounds these concerns. The imaginative horizon of utopian desire of the text is thus limited by its white settler perspective, and this limitation becomes troubling with the return of the light at the novel's conclusion. Reflecting on her desires to refigure her farming practice, Jean remarks:

> In the Mallee there is nothing in between the sun and the soil. It is just like the picture on the boxes of raisins and orange—strong tentacles of light radiating out in a perfect circle. . . . a last golden slab of light glances my arm and sweeps warmly down my feet. (224)

The nothingness between sun and soil is suggestive of *terra nullius,* an emptiness to be filled with a new dawn. This leaves the text balanced on the precipice of catastrophe and renewal: settler belonging, Tiffany suggests, cannot simply be reset, but in turn, there is the suggestion with the returning light that there is the possibility of redemption. This of course, gives rise to a series of considerations regarding both settler belonging and Indigenous sovereignty, that while relevant to Tiffany's novel, are left unaddressed.

While it may be easy to tell stories of the damage wrought by the agricultural practices of settler Australia, as Tiffany so effectively does through her narrativisation of the clearing of the Mallee, it is impossible to offer easy solutions to the catastrophes they document. The practice of Western-style agriculture, driven by progress narratives and the ideology of wheat, still ravages the Australian environment against a backdrop of a changing climate and species extinction. Progress and techno-fantastic ideologies have provided succour to the Australian white settler, and continue to shield white settler bodies while Indigenous sovereignty remains

a footnote on the mainstream political stage. In short, crisis reminds us that the world is full of ugly realities. Difficulty is entirely the point.

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NOTES

[1] For an excellent history of the Mallee and its literary histories, see Potter and Magner 'Murray-Mallee Imaginaries: Towards a Literary History of a Region.'
These national myths, such as the valorisation of struggle (Frost), the myth of progress[2] (Muecke; Bauman), the white male heterosexual hero (Meyer; Martin) and a combination of these (Potter) are well studied in Australian literature, although have not been applied to studies of the farm novel. In another vein, studies of disasters in agricultural settings have been considered in wider nonurban analysis, most notably in Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman's survey of 'rural apocalypse fiction' (20). Drawing from a wide range of Australian novels, such as Tom Flood's *Oceana Fine*, Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and *Everyman's Rules*, they point to a genre of fictions that imagine an Australia in ruins (or being ruined), but there has been little study of how these tropes or disasters have worked specifically in the context of the farm novel.
[3] The book was shortlisted for the Guardian First Book Award in 2006; the Miles Franklin Award in 2006. It won the Dobbie Award for a First Book by an Australian Woman in 2007; the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Fiction in 2005. It was A *Kansas City Star* Noteworthy Book of 2006; and A *Rocky Mountain News* Debut of the Year.
[4] The focus on the ideology of progress marks Tiffany's text as distinct from the *plaasroman* in South Africa, in which the farm became a pastoral retreat for rearticulating white belonging (Devarenne 630). As Devarenne points out, many novels such as Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974) and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) have worked to subvert the colonial logics that attend the pastoral fantasy.
[5] *The Bulletin* has long been credited as being both a major catalyst for Australian Federation and white supremacy (Mansfield 61).
[6] Hughes-d'Aeth quotes the poem at length: 'We have sung the song of the droving days, / Of the March of the travelling sheep— / How by silent stages and lonely ways / On, white battalians creep. / But the man who now by the soil would thrive / Must his spurs to a ploughshare beat; / And the bush bard, changing his tune, may strive / To sing the song of the Wheat! (Patterson cited in Hughes-d'Aeth).
[7] The 'Aussie Battler' remains a mainstay in political messaging, as evidenced by the 2019 Federal election, where both Labor, and the Coalition ran with party slogans that promoted 'A fair go' (Australian Labor Party) and that 'if you have a go, you'll get a go.' (Liberal Party of Australia).

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